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Agenda 3

REPORT OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

New York, 21 July 2000

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CONTENTS

Page

I. Opening of the Meeting 1

II. Statements ..... 3 – 6

III. Summary of discussions ..... 6 – 7

IV. Concluding statement by the Chair 7

Annexes

I. Agenda 8

I. Opening of the meeting

1. The third meeting of the Consultative Forum on the Preparatory Process for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed countries was opened and chaired by the Executive Secretary of the Conference. The agenda and organization of work adopted by the meting is attached in annex I.

II. Statements

2. The **Executive Secretary of the Conference** informed participants of the progress made in the preparatory process for the Conference at the country, regional and global levels. She noted that although preparatory activities were well under way, major challenges lay ahead. She called upon all stakeholders in the preparatory process to provide sound advice and guidance to the Conference secretariat to ensure a successful Conference. In particular, she called upon the LDCs to collectively articulate their priorities and constraints and to put together a "minimum package of deliverables" which could assist in achieving practical, tangible and measurable results at the Conference. She emphasized that such a package should contain both domestic policy measures as well as international support measures. In addition, she called upon LDCs' development partners to embark upon a sound consultative process to secure broad-based consensus on a package of international support measures in favour of LDCs so that LDCs could look forward to obtaining firm pledges and commitments from them in Brussels.

3. The **representative of Bangladesh** said that the Consultative Forum had been conceived as an organizational tool for LDC-III preparation. It had served as a useful medium for interfacing and consensus-building between the UN agencies and stakeholders. Its role had been to build a conceptual framework for Conference objectives. The Conference should draw on the agreements and commitments which had been achieved at other conferences held during the 1990s. The LDC-III outcome should be different from the two LDC Conferences which had preceded it. In the preparations for LDC-III, there should be a critical evaluation of past achievements of the LDCs, or lack thereof. All actors should evaluate why, despite the commitments of the world community, the marginalization of the LDCs was continuing. The rest of the world was steadily moving ahead, but the LDCs were falling further behind. There was a need for a Programme of Action with a difference – something which would be tangible, feasible and measurable. Such a programme should aim *inter alia* at: identifying the critical areas of importance to LDCs, establishing time-bound goals and setting out specific priorities; formulating a convincing action programme geared to attain specific goals; obtaining clear commitments from LDCs and their development partners on what each should do to arrive at time-bound goals; developing a mechanism to evaluate how many of the commitments have been delivered; deciding on the measures needed when commitments are not acted upon; establishing clear linkages between the programme of action and resource requirements; and indicating sources of funding.

4. The **representative of the Group of 77 and China** assured all stakeholders in the Conference of the Group's steadfast support for a successful preparatory process for the Conference and for the efforts of the international community to enable LDCs to overcome the structural constraints which they faced to achieve a growth-oriented transformation of their economies. He noted with deep concern that the retrogression in the economic and social performance of the majority of the least developed countries had deepened in the 1990s. In a world economy being increasingly shaped by globalization and liberalization, the LDCs continued to be marginalized from the mainstream of the global economy and international trading system. They had been bypassed by FDI flows, their debt burden remained high, and the external financial assistance provided to them had further diminished, despite the commitments undertaken by development partners in the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s. Thus the expectation, subsequent to the adoption of the Programme of Action, that the economic and social decline in LDCs would be reversed and that their growth and development process would be reactivated had failed to materialize. In this context, the Group drew attention to the fact that whilst LDCs had initiated bold, sweeping and painful economic and social reforms, their development partners as a whole had not lived up to their commitments in the Programme of Action. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries provided a unique opportunity for the international community, including the funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other international organizations, to review the Programme of Action in a comprehensive manner and to formulate new national and international policies and measures for the sustainable development of LDCs.

5. The Heads of State of the Group of 77 and China had fully committed themselves to this undertaking during the South Summit in Havana, Cuba. They had further expressed their concern that, in the context of a widening North-South gap, the social and economic conditions of the LDCs had been deteriorating. The Summit had also emphasized the need for the free movement of natural persons, an area in which developing countries had a comparative advantage, in the global economy.

6. In concluding, he stressed that the challenges facing the least developed countries were as substantial as the opportunities. There was great need for fresh thought and innovative ideas to identify approaches to face up to these challenges and maximize opportunities through collective resolve. The forthcoming milestone intergovernmental events, namely, the Millennium Summit of the General Assembly and the High-level Event on Financing for Development, provided important opportunities to broaden the consensus on some of the issues before the Conference.

7. The **Presidency of the European Union** said that the EU was fully committed to the Third LDC Conference. In this regard, the EU called upon the international community to participate actively in both the preparatory process and the Conference, as this would be a manifestation of real partnership with the LDCs. The EU viewed the preparatory process as key to the success of the Conference, and it would participate in that process at both the national, the regional and the global levels. At the local level, EU delegations in LDCs would contribute to the preparation of national programmes of

action, in collaboration with other agencies and organizations, in order to avoid duplication and achieve coherence and efficiency in addressing issues. Finally, the EU would seek to prevent any other major UN event from overshadowing the LDC Conference, to be hosted by the European Union in Brussels.

8. The **representative of the European Community** reaffirmed the commitment of this organization to provide substantial financial support to LDCs and landlocked and island developing countries. This commitment was reflected in the agreement signed with ACP countries in Cotonou on 24 June 2000. In addition to the logistical support provided by the European Union to the Conference, the Government of Belgium was committed to facilitating the participation of delegations by providing them with immunity privileges and security. Furthermore, at the local level EU delegations in the LDCs were participating in the preparation of the country programmes of action in collaboration with other agencies and organizations. The EU was providing funding to the national preparation process. Finally, the EU budget for 2001 would include funds for financing the Conference and the NGO Forum. Some money for follow-up was also foreseen.

9. The **Secretary of the Conference** presented the proposed structure and scenario for the Conference. He noted that the Conference would consist of: (a) the Committee of the Whole, which would be negotiating the text of the Programme of Action; (b) a series of interactive debates aimed at achieving tangible results; (c) parallel events; (d) general statements broadcast on the Internet; and (e) exhibition and pavilions. With regard to the interactive debate, he indicated the proposed themes and the preparatory activities involved. He emphasized the linkages and potential synergies between the interactive debates, the parallel events, and the work of the Committee of the Whole. He also indicated the proposed nature of the NGO forum and how it was proposed to link up the forum with the proceedings at the Conference itself.

10. The **representative of Ethiopia** commended the work which has been done up to date. However, he believed that a great deal of work remains to be done. For this reason he considered that the intersessional work should begin as soon as possible. In his view the intersessional work should be done in Geneva because the UNCTAD intergovernmental machinery was the one which had undertaken LDC work in the past, including the annual review by the Trade and Development Board of the implementation of the Paris Programme of Action for the 1990s, while the intergovernmental machinery in New York was responsible for many conferences and meetings. The Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee would of course be held in New York.

11. The **representative of Japan** expressed appreciation for the presentation of the objectives and proposed substantive agenda of the Conference by the Conference secretariat. He cautioned however that it would be premature for the UNCTAD secretariat to prejudge the outcomes of the Conference. This was clearly a prerogative of the intergovernmental process and would be a result of negotiations among Governments.

12. The **representative of Bangladesh**, referring to the presentation made by the LDC-III secretariat on the structure of the Conference, cautioned that the secretariat might have gone too far in indicating what the expected outcomes of the Conference might be, as such outcomes were matters for Governments to negotiate. The LDC Conference should not focus on financial issues alone but should also deal with social aspects of development. Finally in view of the representation of all 48 LDCs in New York, and as most members of the Bureau were based there, New York offered the best venue not only for the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee but also for the substantive intersessional work which would need to be undertaken.

12. The **representative of the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Union** stated that his organization would be pleased to act as focal point for NGOs at the LDC-III Conference. It was in the process of identifying leaders to mobilize NGOs in LDCs. Brussels was a good location for mobilizing NGOs, and to ensure media attention, the focal point would organize a major event during the weekend preceding the LDC-III Conference. He invited ideas for action. Referring to potential problems, he said it was important that no competing UN conference should be organized at the same time as the LDC-III Conference. If, for example, the UN Financing for Development conference was scheduled at about the time of LDC-III Conference, NGO and media attention would be diverted.

13. The **representative of the Youth Forum** said that the Forum would continue to support and advocate the cause of the LDCs. The objectives that these countries and their development partners had set out for themselves in Paris should be realized. The Forum had set up a fund to defray the participation of LDC youth in internships and fellowships at the United Nations which would be launched in Brussels during LDC III. The deadline for applications was 1 September 2000, and other pertinent information was available at www.wafunif.org.

III. Summary of discussions

14. In the ensuing exchange of views, the following issues were raised: whether a clear linkage would be established between the country programmes of action and the global Programme of Action as an important test of ownership; what the outcome should be of the regional round tables; whether the suggestions made by the Conference secretariat would not pre-empt future negotiations; the understanding on the part of LDCs that in Brussels they would present their experience and problems with the previous programme of action, on the basis of which donors would be expected to propose a minimum of measures in favour of LDCs; the importance of goodwill ambassadors to donor capitals to ensure that a package of deliverables would be adopted during the Conference; the importance of an in-depth analysis of why the previous Programme of Action had failed to bring about the desired results, pinpointing the real responsibilities of LDCs and donors for the lack of concrete action; the need to hold inter-sessional meetings in New York; the impression that the Conference had too many

messages; the importance of creating linkages between LDC III and upcoming events like the Millennium Summit and the Financing for Development event; the failure of LDCs to break out of poverty, whereas countries like China and India had succeeded; the need to highlight also the examples of LDCs which were successfully heading towards possible graduation; the necessity to ensure that LDC III did not clash with any other events on development; and finally, the question as to whether the remaining theme on social services delivery and food security and sustainable natural resources management would be taken up by any of the agencies that had participated in the Inter-agency Meeting.

15. In responding to the questions raised, the **Executive Secretary of the Conference** stated that: the idea of goodwill ambassadors was a good one and would be pursued further; the logos and themes of the Conference had already be agreed upon in consultation with DPI, but all information and suggestions provided to the Preparatory Meeting were intended to guide the decisions of the intergovernmental process which ultimately would decide on the best structure and themes for the Conference; whereas a number of tangible deliverables could be expected from the donor partners in Brussels, LDCs also needed to deliver on such aspects as policy reforms, governance and aid efficiency and effectiveness; there were no parallels between the situation of the LDCs and that of China and India in such critical areas to development as size of market and resource base; the scheduling of inter-sessional meetings could best be discussed in the regional groups and among the LDCs themselves; the regional round tables had been organized at the specific request of the General Assembly and were not necessarily meant as pledging conferences as such, but the opportunities that they might open up in terms of commitments should not be ignored; and WHO and ILO had, on a preliminary basis, indicated willingness to take on social services delivery, and FAO and UNEP had been requested to explore the possibility of dealing with food security and sustainable natural resources management.

IV. Concluding statement by the Chair

16. The **Executive Secretary of the Conference** said that the Conference was an intergovernmental undertaking, and the secretariat would be guided by Governments' collective views. This was the only way in which the secretariat could provide the support called for by the General Assembly. Given that the intergovernmental preparatory process was now being launched with the holding of the first session of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (IPC), consultations among participants would have to continue during the inter-sessional period through mechanisms to be decided by the IPC. These mechanisms would supersede the Consultative Forum.

ANNEX I

AGENDA

10:30 a.m.-1 p.m.	Opening of the Meeting by Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka Executive Secretary, LDC-III
	Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting
	Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Conference on the progress in the preparatory process for the Conference and issues before the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (IPC) and on the preparation of country-level programmes of action
	Statement by the Coordinator of LDCs in New York
	Statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77 in New York
	Statement by the representative of the European Union (host of the Conference)/European Commission
	Briefing by the Secretary of the Conference on the proposed design and organizational structure of the Conference
	Exchange of views on the progress in the preparatory process at the country, regional and global levels
3 p.m.-6 p.m.	Exchange of views on the progress in the preparatory process at the country, regional and global levels (continued)
	Summing up by the Chair
	Closure of Meeting